



Inside Ag *May 7, 2008*

Farmers can Help Protect Colorado's Potato Industry from Damaging Fungus



For most of Colorado, potato shipments have been made and the spuds are going in the ground but it's not too late to protect the state's potato industry. Colorado's San Luis Valley is one of the few places in the country that has not been inundated with an extremely damaging fungus called Late Blight and the Colorado Department of Agriculture has procedures in place to protect Colorado spuds.

Late blight, *Phytophthora infestans*, is a fungus that is among the most devastating of all plant diseases. Most commonly recognized as the Irish potato famine fungus, it can attack all portions of the plant.

Late blight spores are explosive and the subsequent disease can destroy whole fields of plants in a remarkably short time. Under favorable conditions, a potato field that had mild and scattered lesions in one week can be nearly destroyed the next week.

"The potato industry is the number one agricultural industry in the San Luis Valley; if this fungus is allowed into our fields, it could be very hard to contain and could cause irreparable economic injury to the potato producers in the area," said Mitch Yergert, director of CDA's plants division. "There are procedures in place to protect the industry and they must be followed. But, it is also important to remember that early detection is also important to containing this fungus."

Late blight affects the leaves, stems, and body of the potato. The leaves will become pale green with lesions. Those lesions will develop into a brown or purplish-black color, sometimes with a yellow halo. Lesions also appear on the petioles and stems as black, greasy areas. Stem lesions may girdle the stem and kill the foliage above the lesion. A field severely infected with late blight will give off a characteristic foul odor caused by rapidly decaying potato tissue.

Late Blight Management

Now that planting is in full swing, focus shifts to cull pile management:

- Destroy cull potatoes by composting, burial, chopping, freezing, or feeding to livestock prior to new crop emergence.
- Monitor cull disposal sites for sprouting and treat with herbicides.
- If feeding or composting cull potatoes please contact Leo Kaczek, CDA Division of Plant Industry at 719-580-5507 prior to beginning either. There are specific rules that must be followed to comply with the late blight quarantine.
- **At all times--** any cull potatoes being transported must be covered by a tarp to prevent the load from spreading potential infection.
- Notify CPAC or CDA of any cull pile problems immediately.

From the **Colorado Potato Growers Association (CPAC):**

"Growers brought in twenty-two seed samples to be tested for late blight during our testing program. None of the samples tested positive. Thanks to Rob Davidson for checking the

samples daily and also to the growers who took the time to bring the samples in for testing. As a follow up to this testing CPAC will be working with CDA, the CSU research farm and interested local agriculture consultants to conduct late blight field testing of fields planted with imported seed.”

Colorado ranks fifth in the nation for potato production. In 2007, Colorado’s potato crop was valued at \$181.8 million; more than \$174.1 million was produced in the San Luis Valley.